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EVALUATION OF TEST SUSPENSION PROPOSAL BY SENATOR GOREReport by Interdepartmental Working Group on Disarmament

On November 19, following a call on the President on November 17, Senator Gore submitted a memorandum to the President outlining a proposal for U.S. action on suspension of nuclear weapons tests. This proposal calls for a new U.S. position at the Geneva Conference on the Suspension of Nuclear Weapons Tests consisting of a Presidential announcement of "unconditional and unilateral cessation of all nuclear tests in the earth's atmosphere" for perhaps three years, a call for similar action by other nuclear powers, and a call for the Geneva Conference to proceed immediately with negotiation of a treaty for a permanent stoppage of atmospheric tests.

Senator Gore's proposal is based on the stated assumptions that:

1. Present U.S. goals at the Conference are unattainable.
2. Nuclear testing to date has caused an "antisocial contamination of the atmosphere" which has led to world-wide fear of fall-out which is Russia's most powerful propaganda weapon against the United States.
3. Present detection systems are technically efficient in the detection of atmospheric detonations.

The Working Group considers that the Gore proposal would not be a sound position for the United States to take at this time. Although the assumptions listed above are inaccurate, the proposal has some elements which may be useful in developing a fall-back position in the event that the current negotiations fail.

Comment on Assumptions. There is no reason to believe at this time that U.S. objectives in the Conference are unattainable. The basic U.S. objective is a two-pronged one: to obtain an agreement for suspension of nuclear tests under effective international control, or to expose the unwillingness of the Soviet Union to accept international control as the basis for failure to reach agreement if this is the result of the Conference. It is not possible at present to say that an agreement will not be reached despite current unacceptable Soviet positions, since serious negotiation has just commenced and the Soviet Union professes to accept the report of the Geneva Experts on a control system. We remain confident on the basis of discussion so far that, if the Conference breaks down, the blame will clearly rest on the Soviet Union.

The United States

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The United States has consistently taken the position that fall-out from nuclear testing does not constitute a significant hazard. While world-wide concern over fall-out has not been allayed by the statements of the U.S. and the U.K. or by the generally reassuring report of the United Nations, a proposal for anything less than cessation of all weapons tests would be unlikely to have the simplicity which would be necessary to remove these fears, particularly since the Soviet Union would immediately charge that we were motivated primarily by a desire to evade a suspension. Furthermore, the accelerating Soviet testing has made the Soviet Union increasingly vulnerable on the fall-out issue.

The present nuclear test detection system is not adequate for monitoring atmospheric tests. The Geneva technical conference clearly established the requirement for stations within the Soviet Union if atmospheric bursts down to 1 kiloton are to be detected.

There is evidence from our latest underground shots that assumptions made by the Conference of Experts reference the possibility of detecting underground explosions and based on the limited Rainier data then available, may have been overly optimistic to a serious degree.

The Gore Proposal as a U.S. Position Now. In view of these considerations it would be undesirable for the United States to advance the Gore proposals at this time. We would give the Soviet Union an excuse to escape from showing its true position on acceptance of international controls and it would be unlikely to have major propaganda value. It would almost certainly lead to a break in negotiations advantageous to the Soviet Union and would thus remove such chance as there is of obtaining international inspection within the Soviet Union.

The Gore Proposal as a Fall-Back Position. If the present negotiations do break down, the United States may well wish to announce a policy of moderation in future testing. Such self-imposed moderation may be prudent since, even if the blame for the break lies with the Soviet Union, increased pressure for a cessation of tests can be expected to be directed against the U.S. and the Soviet Union alike and unilateral U.S. action would cut the ground under proposals to this effect.

The AEC, however, believes that should an approach to test suspension such as the Gore proposal involving limitations be advanced by the U.S., it should not be done on a unilateral basis, but in the form of a proposed international agreement at the time of deadlock or breakdown of the current Geneva negotiations.

Further study must be given to the proper course of action. It is not clear at present that underground testing will permit satisfactory diagnostic measurement, including yields, to meet important future test requirements. Testing in outer space will present even greater and more complex diagnostic problems.

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Remarks:

Attached is a copy of the Report of the Working Group on the Gore Proposal. We concurred in this proposal.

A separate copy has been sent to Mr. Bissell.

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